# Modal Verbs

In English modal verbs tell us about a person's opinion or attitude. They are not factual. The Present Simple and Past Simple are factual.

Modal verbs work with other verbs and words to produce meaning. Like other words there are 'close' and 'distant' forms.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Eg | Could you open the window please? | *Distant* |
| | Can you open the window please? | *Close* |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Close** | can | shall | may | will | must |
| **Distant** | could | should | might | would | *had to* |

*Had to is a special case. Anything distant from us ie viewed as objective rather than subjective.*
'I must do it' *is* ***subjective*** *but* 'I had to do it' *can be viewed* ***objectively*** *because it is done, finished, a fact.*

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Modal verbs work in clines, which allow us to express different degrees of meaning. When used with a "present perfect' verb modal verbs 'look back' to express a relationship between the event in the 'past' and my **present** attitude. The meaning is a combination of modal verb + meaning of the 'Present Perfect'. The 'present perfect' is needed to **bring the event out of the past, away from the objective reality of a Simple Past form.**

Eg 'It might have happened' looks back from my present attitude of uncertainty ('might')
to the event. 'It happened.' is objective fact, with no connection to my present opinion.

**Cline of modals of deduction about the Past.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **It happened .** | **- Objective Fact.** |
| It will have happened. | - I'm sure but you might not be. Subjective. |
| It must have happened. | - I'm sure but it's still not a fact. Subjective. |
| It should have happened. | - It was meant to happen – but I'm not sure it did. Subjective. |
| It may have happened. | - Maybe. Subjective. |
| It might have happened. | - I'm less sure. Subjective. |
| It could have happened. | - I'm even less sure. Subjective. |
| It can't have happened. | - I'm sure it didn't but you might not be. Subjective. |
| **It didn't happen.** | **- Objective Fact.** |

**Cline of modals about the Non-Past.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **It happens.** | **- Objective Fact.** |
| It will happen. | - I'm sure it will but you might not be. Subjective. |
| It must happen. | - I'm sure but it's still not a fact. Subjective. |
| It should happen. | - It is meant to happen – but I'm not sure it will. Subjective. |
| It may happen. | - Maybe. Subjective. |
| It might happen. | - I'm less sure. Subjective. |
| It could happen. | - I'm even less sure. Subjective. |
| It can't happen. | - I'm sure it won't but you might not be. Subjective. |
| **It doesn't happen.** | **- Objective Fact.** |

Like modals + Present Perfect, modals + first Form of the verb are expressing a relationship between two things – my subjective opinion and the event itself. It might be an opinion of a specific future event or more general thoughts.

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**Task 1. Discuss the meaning of these sentences. Think about the different kinds of distance – Time, Reality and Formality.**

1. You must never do that again.
   You shouldn't do that.

2. You can go now.
   May I go now?
   Might I go now?

3. I wish I could drive.
   I could swim when I was three.

4. I could do it if I wanted to.
   I could call him instead of writing.
   Could you help me please?

5. I might be able to help you.
   I might have some free time later this week – I'll call you.

6. Might I have that in writing please?
   Could I have that in writing please?

7. Might I make a suggestion?
   Could I make a suggestion?

8. Shall I carry that for you?
   Can I help you?

9. It should work – let's try it.
   It might work – let's try it.

10. Should you need any help, please do not hesitate to ask.
    If you need any help, please do not hesitate to ask.

11. I shouldn't think so.
    I don't think so.

12. He must be out – there's no answer.
    He'll have gone shopping – he said he might have to go today.

13. **A:** 'Someone called you yesterday but he didn't leave his name.'
    **B:** 'That'll have been George. He said he would call.'

14. If you take a seat, I'll see if she's free.
    If you will take a seat, I'll see if she's free.
    If you would take a seat, I'll see if she's free.

15. I would have called you but I didn't have your mobile number.
    I couldn't call you because I didn't have your mobile number.

16. Shall we go?
    Let's go.

17. Would you marry me?
    Will you marry me?

18. I'll be there – don't worry.
    I might make it, I'm not sure.

19. Would you like another cup of tea?
    Do you want another cup of tea?

20. OJ killed her – no doubt about it.
    OJ must have killed her. I'm sure of it.

21. Look at those clouds. If it rains, we'll get soaked.
    We're lucky there's not a cloud in sight.

    If it rained, we'd get soaked and we're miles from anywhere.

22. I wouldn't worry about it if I were you.
    Don't worry, it'll be fine.
    You shouldn't worry, everything'll be fine.

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